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ABSTRACT

In an effort to provide support for employees and their families, Red Deer College (RDC) developed the Resources, Employees, Assistance, Counselling, and Health (REACH) program. The program is administered by a committee of five people who represent the five major employee groups at the college (i.e., senior administration, middle administration, support staff and executive secretaries, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and faculty). The REACH program has four major components. First, a referral service assists employees and their families in accessing initial, short-term counseling programs or services in the community. From 1987 to 1989, 68 people were referred to outside agencies through the service. Second, a peer support component trains individuals from all levels of college staff to help other employees to deal with problems. Though only 9% of the RDC staff had used the peer support services, 82% of employees knew of their existence. Third, a wellness component focuses on providing such special employee programs as workshops on weight management, aging, financial matters, fitness, and mental health. Over a 3-year period, 719 employees have participated in these programs. The fourth and newest aspect of the program is the development of a collection of print and non-print resources for employees. Information on program costs and future goals, and comments from a program review are included. (GFW)

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RED DEER COLLEGE

REACH PRESENTATION

R - RESOURCES
E - EMPLOYEES
A - ASSISTANCE
C - COUNSELLING
H - HEALTH

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Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, "Rendezvous '90" (Charlottetown, Prince Edwards Island, May 26-30, 1990).

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REACH PRESENTATION

People are an institution's most valuable resource. Although most of us, have preventive maintenance budgets and plans for our physical plants and equipment, spend staff and dollars monitoring the state of our financial fitness, we expect our most important resources to maintain themselves - despite the fact that they spend a good portion of their lives in our service. The presentation this afternoon focuses on a program for people, a program called REACH.

Objectives:

By the end of the presentation, I hope that you will be able to:

1. Describe the components of the REACH program at Red Deer College.

2. Describe how the program works, who uses it, its strengths and weaknesses.

3. Have some thoughts about whether a similar program could be useful and would be implemented in your institution.

4. Know some of the pitfalls along the way and where it is possible to start to avoid these. What is important for success.

Red Deer College has a program for employees and their families which has evolved over time and of which we as a College are very proud. I like to refer to it as a program of the people by the people for the good of the people. It is called REACH - an acronym for Resources for Employee Assistance Counselling and Health.

R - Resources are People, Dollars, Programs and Print and Non-Print materials.

E - Employees are anyone who works for the College and members of their immediate family.

A - Assistance in the form of support, access to information, and referral when lifestyle difficulties or life's events cause difficulties in coping.

C - Counselling services are made available upon referral by the College's referral agent, who is also the Health Nurse.

H - Health is the preventative portion of the REACH program. Through educational programs, assessment programs, and proactive awareness of the workplace REACH resources can be deployed to provide coping skills so that when lifestyle problems arise, employees will be better able to deal with them to perhaps avoid lifestyle problems.

What is REACH?

REACH			
	is		
Referral to Outside Agencies	**Programs**	**Peer Support**	**Print and Non-Print Resources**

The four components of the program are:

a) referral to resources external to the College,
b) seminars, workshops and other programs,
c) peer support,
d) print and non-print resources in the College's Learning Resources Center.

Dr. Luterbach, our President is unable to attend this conference but he was instrumental in getting this program started at Red Deer College and is extremely supportive, a key to success.

What Does REACH Do? - Overall Goals

1. To provide assistance and referrals to employees and their families seeking outside resources.

2. To provide a core of trained peer support personnel within Red Deer College.

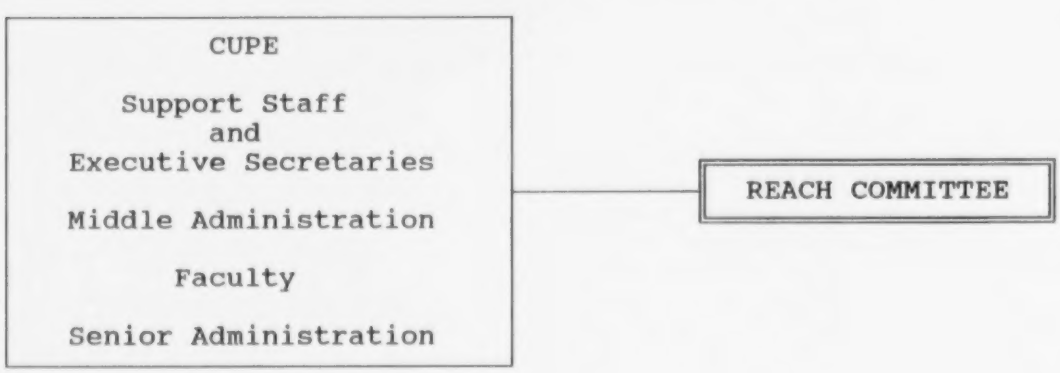
3. To promote the concept of wellness as a lifestyle for Red Deer College employees.

4. To develop a collection of print and non-print resources about coping and lifestyle problems.

How Is REACH Organized?

REACH is administered by a committee of five people, selected by and representative of the five major employee groups in the institution, Senior Administration, Middle Administration, Support Staff and Executive Secretaries, CUPE, and Faculty.

STRUCTURE REACH COMMITTEE



This committee:

1. Coordinates the elements of the program, e.g. one member is a liaison person with the PEER SUPPORT group, one member is responsible for getting input on LRC resources and working with the LRC to get them and one is responsible for the budget and works with the referral agent and accounting. Everyone contributes ideas for programming.

2. Sets goals and objectives e.g. in 1989/90 the goals were:

   a) To train 15 more peer supporters.
   b) To send representatives to the International EAP Conference in New York.
   c) To evaluate the REACH program.
   d) To promote the program.
   e) To organize and make available resources.
   f) To provide support to the peer support group so they may achieve their objectives.
   g) To update the community resource book by September.
   h) To offer programs to meet the needs of Red Deer College personnel.

3. Prepares a budget annually. In 1989/90 the budget was $20,210 for programming and $10,000 for referral. These dollars are received primarily from the Unemployment Insurance Rebate Committee. This is a committee which administers the unemployment rebates received by the College on behalf of all employees, to be used for projects which benefit all employees. Upon application this committee has three times given money to REACH for:

   a) support programs,
   b) access to professional services.

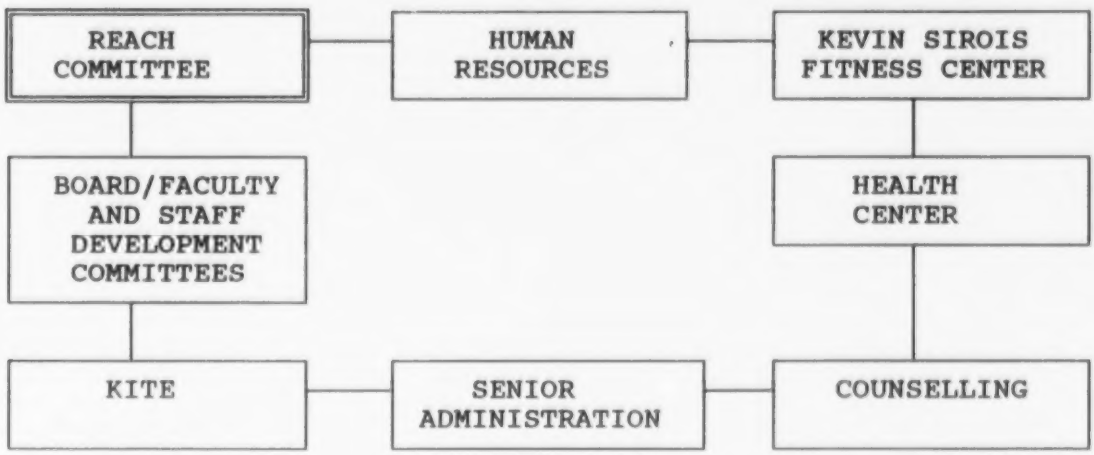
   Dollar amounts are $30,000 - $40,000 not including referral monies over three years. Dollars have also come through the College's Foundation from a corporate donor giving dollars to improve the quality of worklife.

4. Conducts needs assessments. These have been very informal.

5. Plans programming - this is based on the needs assessments, and on input from the referral agent, peer supporters and other groups in the College.

6. Works with other groups in the College to promote quality of worklife, e.g. these are some of the other groups in the College that we could/would/should work with - and for example a series of financial planning workshops this year were co-sponsored by Human Resources, REACH and the Staff Development Committees.

WELLNESS RESOURCES IN THE INSTITUTION



7. Monitors the use of the program elements, e.g. just finished conducting a program review.

8. Publicizes the program, both inside and outside the institution. The brochure is one example - it is sent out annually to all employees at their home address. We try to have an article in the monthly in-house publication, Reviews and Previews. Other avenues include a bulletin board in the staff lounge, presentations about the program at staff orientations, and sending notices about individual programs.

   Articles about the program have appeared in EAP Digest, March/April 1989, and the Canadian Journal of Counselling. Presentations are made to outside groups, or information is provided to other organizations working on or hoping to implement similar programs, e.g. School Boards in the region.

What Does REACH Do And What Has It Achieved?

Referral Service

Red Deer College's referral service uses an internal model, i.e. we use a referral agent who is an employee of the institution, our Health Nurse. This has its plus' and minus' as one of the major concerns people express about seeking help is confidentiality. There were a number of reasons why this model was chosen:

1. Cost, a very practical reason. The Health Nurse is already paid for and as long as she has the time to handle the load there is no additional cost.

2. The nurse is familiar with the College environment, events that are occurring, etc.

3. The office is a non-threatening one with people entering for any number of reasons so confidentiality in terms of visibility is offered. The health centre records are confidential.

4. In a centre the size of Red Deer our options for external referral agents were limited.

A person may self refer to the nurse, or be referred by a friend, peer supporter, colleague or a supervisor. The nurse assesses the person to determine what type of assistance is required. This may be referral to a workshop, e.g. a stress management program, to an outside agency's program, e.g. AADAC or Canadian Mental Health Associations Bereavement program, to a lawyer, or a private counsellor. This may include the family as well as the employee.

The purpose of the Community Resource/Referral Service is to assist employees and their families to access initial counselling programs or services, NOT TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR LONG TERM PROFESSIONAL SERVICES.

Guidelines

1. A referral to a community/resource program that requires accessing the Trust Fund must be made through the referral agent.

   People cannot go out, find themselves a counsellor and then bring the bill to the REACH program.

2. The referral agent is responsible for the record keeping of all the monies in the trust fund using a coding/filing system kept in the Health Centre.

   We initially had all kinds of difficulty with this and the College benefit plan. The Health Nurse was not eligible to refer people, it had to be done by a physician, and information on clients had to be disclosed to the College's Human Resources Department. These two problems were worked out and the Health Nurse is eligible to refer and claims sent through Human Resources are coded.

Statistics - Who Uses It?

A total of 68 people were referred from July 1987 to December 1989. Of these 23 were Faculty, 6 were Administration, 20 were CUPE, Support Staff, Executive Secretaries, 19 were family members. The following areas were involved: stress management, marriage counselling, depression, sexual abuse, incest, child support/child custody, alcoholism, terminal illness, physical/emotional abuse, pain management, adult children of alcoholics, mental illness, grief counselling, behaviour problems - children. Dollars spent to May 1990 for 93 referrals - $19,640.50 - $200.00 each.

It is the joint responsibility of the REACH trust fund, the employee and the College benefit plan for payment of professional community services fees.

Guidelines For Sharing Costs Are As Follows:

A. <u>With Benefit Plan</u>

   Benefit plan covers $30.00/hour (maximum of $350.00/year, fiscal year being January - December) for psychology fees.

   Example: Benefit plan $30.00 to maximum of $350.00/year. Remainder of the fee to be divided as follows:

REACH Trust Fund	50%
Employee	50%

   Note: The REACH Trust Fund fiscal year is July 1 - June 30. The fund will cover to a maximum of $420.00 per family.

B. Without Benefit Plan

The major difference is that if the benefit plan can be accessed, the dollars go further since there is a maximum of $420.00 per year per family from the trust fund.

REACH Trust Fund	50%
Employee	50%

Note: The REACH Trust Fund fiscal year is July 1 - June 30. The fund will cover to a maximum of $420.00 per family.

Effectiveness:

This was an area that was reviewed as part of the program review with a questionnaire being sent by the referral agent to those involved. Results and comments:

Resource/referral:

"It is also essential that the resource/referral aspect be kept separate from College admin and as much as possible, College politics. I know of several people, including myself who have been immensely helped by this service."

"People are unsure of it being confidential. More assurance is required."

"An excellent service."

"I think this program is great and was a great help to me. I was helped through a very bad time."

"I think the resource/referral aspect of the program is excellent. I received information to access "a helper" with a minimum amount of hassle."

For this portion of her job, the Health Nurse reports to the REACH Committee. So far, this has not created any difficulties although it certainly has the potential to do so. The REACH Committee's concerns are confidentiality, accessibility (can people get to the nurse when they need to), approachability (if they can do they want to), accuracy in diagnosis and referral (i.e. how well does she use a variety of resources), accuracy in controlling funds and enforcing guidelines re: accessibility (are guidelines followed, benefit plans accessed when possible, etc., and thoroughness in reporting, communication with the Committee in anticipation of group needs.

PEER SUPPORT

I believe Peer support is one of the elements that makes the Red Deer College program somewhat unique. In the Red Deer Region, the concept of Peer Support is fairly common and is used in high schools, AADAC and hospitals. It is also the one that has been the most difficult for the REACH Committee to "manage". Peer supporters are individuals from all segments and levels of College staff who have training in communication skills and information on resources.

Role of a Peer Supporter:

Peer supporters promote a positive working environment by being available:

1. As an active listener to assist colleagues to help themselves to deal with their problems.

2. To refer colleagues to appropriate resources.

3. And are involved and concerned with the quality of the work place.

Functioning of Peer Supporters:

The recruitment information for PEER supporters says "when people have problems, they frequently talk to their colleagues and peers." Most of us are not trained to be as supportive as we might otherwise be. By providing understanding and training in communication, confidentiality, referral, problem solving and decision making to College personnel who are willing to be peer support personnel it is hoped that there will be a supportive atmosphere in the College which will enable employees to effectively deal with problems.

Annually peer supporters are recruited from all the College groups using the following:

We would like you to consider becoming a Peer Support Person if you:

- are able to treat information confidentially
- like to be with people
- are interested in helping people to help themselves solve problems
- are willing to learn about and improve your communication skills (including a problem solving model)
- are able to attend a training session of 2.5 days, Thursday evening, Friday and Saturday
- make a commitment to the program
- are willing to report your statistics

To date, we have trained 43 staff in communication skills. My goal is to train everyone in the institution.

Criteria for Selection of Peer Supporters:

1. The overall Peer Support Group should be proportional to staff groups in the College, i.é., approximately 45% faculty, 31% staff, 16% other, and 8% administration.

2. It should make an attempt to be representative of the use/demand of last year's Peer Support Group.

3. Peer Supporters should be available in all of the physical areas of the College for accessibility.

4. There should be a male/female balance, as well as a cross-section of age groups represented.

5. Peer Supporters must be able to attend the training session at Terratima.

6. A Peer Supporter should have a positive attitude, be approachable, be tolerant and non-critical.

Peer supporters' names are listed in the College phone book, appear on the REACH bulletin board in the staff lounge, and are highlighted at a coffee/cake sale on Valentine's day. Each year the training is held off campus for two and one half days. At one point during the training, previously trained peer supporters are invited to meet with the new group. This year, for example, of 26 previously trained people still with the College, 13 gave up a Saturday to drive 60 miles to meet with the new group.

One BIG plus of this group is that it provides an opportunity for a cross section of College staff both vertically and horizontally, to get to know one another very well.

Peer supporters function as a group on campus with one of the REACH Committee members as liaison. They plan meetings, ongoing training sessions and publicize their group. Two areas, which are monitored by REACH, is that the group remain open not closed, and that they retain their role as listeners not counsellors.

Effectiveness:

From program review and general questionnaire:

Awareness of Peer Support - 82.4% said they were aware of Peer Supporters.

Use of Peer Support - 9%

REACH Peer Supporters provide input on program to Program Review.

Strengths:

-All staff represented/lack of barriers with respect to which group you belong to.
-Original orientation "provides team building" concept of shared experience promoting team concept applies here.
-Attracts caring concerned people - not alone.
-Flexibility in participation, time conflicts, lower profile.

Improvements:

-Group should be able to evolve and develop in response to task and maintenance needs of group.
-Rejuvenation/booster from time to time.
-Continue ongoing skill development "how to develop a supportive work environment."

Comments on Peer Support from General Staff Questionnaire:

"Professionalism objectivity of peer support team."

"Excellent to have support networks/peers who are training, caring and welcome people with needs."

"Peer support program is great."

"Peers helping peers is excellent."

"How does one ask for help? We are all so busy around here, why should or how could one burden another."

"I think if I was unsure it would be because I wouldn't necessarily want another staff member to know I had a weakness."

"I have access to other support systems."

WELLNESS

This is a very holistic definition of wellness and includes mental, physical, financial, etc. This is the area of focus for programs. Some examples of programs sponsored in the past two years include:

The Aging Game	A series of noon hour seminars dealing with various aspects of aging.
Money Management	An evening workshop.
Who's in Charge Around Here	An all day workshop held twice so that all employees could attend.
Healthy Weights in 88	A weight management program - as a result of this program, one person was able to eliminate the need for high blood pressure medication for the first time in 15 years.

Take Heart	Included blood pressure measurement, cholesterol screening, a fitness test, and nutrition assessment. As a result of this program, five high risk (due to high cholesterol) employees were identified and provided assistance to change their lifestyles.
Lady Beware	A noon hour seminar brought in at a time when there were some unusual incidents occurring on campus.
Mental Health	In Mental Health Week REACH sponsored nurture notes delivered on campus by the Hug Bear. People completed notes, addressed them to colleagues on campus, and they were delivered on a particular day all around the campus with hugs for everyone, not just those getting nurture notes.

There have been 719 participants in these programs over 3 years.

PRINT AND NON-PRINT RESOURCES

We have only this year (1989/1990) begun to work on the objective of developing a collection of resources. We have actively been selecting and screening materials, soliciting suggestions and having items ordered by and entered into the LRC catalogue. It was decided to put them into the LRC collection as a method of making them most available in hopefully a non-threatening way. With the automated circulation system there is no permanent record of borrowers and no one would know or need to know why a staff member would be borrowing a certain item.

CONCLUSION

In summary, some of the keys to the success and strengths of REACH are:

1. Senior Administration Support - actions and words.

2. Funding available - while not all programs need to be free there should be a minimal cost. Referrals would be more difficult if no money.

3. Involvement of staff - the prime movers in our program were/are staff not administration - it was staff who had a vision and worked very hard to communicate and achieve it.

4. Have policies and guidelines.

5. Broadbrush or holistic approach - something for everyone.

6. Publicity - need to keep reminding staff you are there.

7. Accessibility by family - i.e., available to all employees and their families.

8. Availability of Health Nurse.

9. Links to other groups in the College - Faculty/Board PD keys to success - staff commitment to concept all voluntary.

That outlines the data about the organization and the component of REACH (Resources for Employee Assistance Counselling and Health) at Red Deer College. Some of the comments from the recent program review may help to provide the flavour.

Comments from Program Review of REACH Program 1990

Strengths of the REACH Program

-Good advertising; good people involved, I would feel very comfortable approaching most of them.

-Flexibility, variety, responsiveness, financial assistance, confidentiality, independence from line structure of College.

-Open, easily accessible by College staff and families, diverse.

-None - this program is for the frightfully ill informed. Real social problems should be handled by outside professionals.

-It's always there if you need it. I like the fact its' diversified and has tried to coordinate with other programs.

-The program is a complete waste of time and money. It should be discontinued.

-Its main strength is that it involves not only the employee but also the family. The services offered are current and dynamic.

-Bright blue brochures make it really stand out.

-The fact that it is there if needed.

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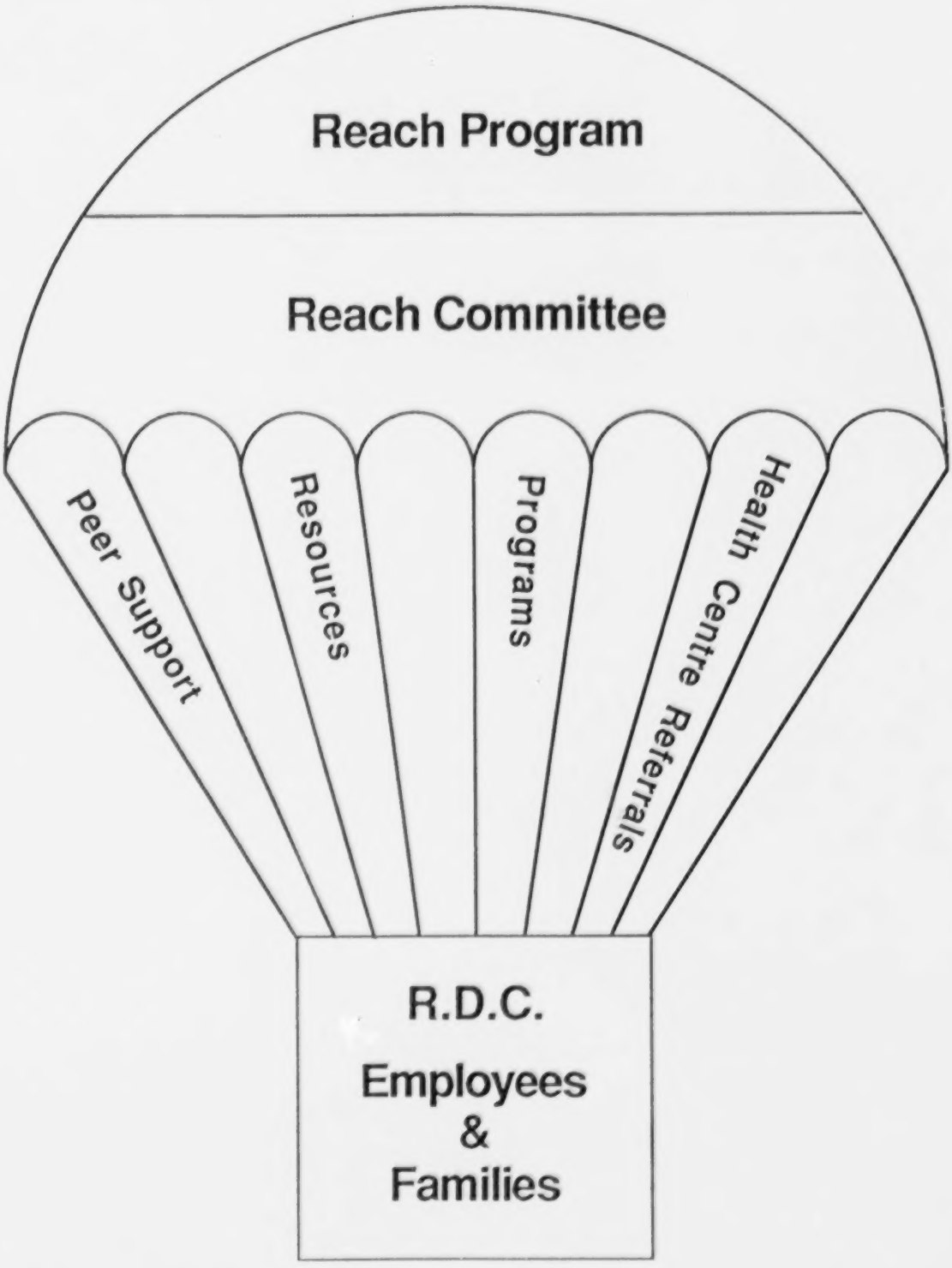

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